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THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' CONVENTION

It was my privilege to attend the eighteenth annual convention of the Photographers' Association of America held at Lake Chautauqua last month. I hardly know which interested me more, the seven hundred photographers there assembled, or the endless display of "human documents" which they brought with them. A body of alert, intelligent workers, combining the keenness of business men with the aspirations and sympathies of artists, these men of the camera form as progressive a group of citizens as one meets in many a day.

To be sure, some—yes, many—are much better companions than artists. The thousands of photographs displayed upon the walls and coming from every state in the union were not uniformly triumphant works of art. The really artistic groups were infrequent, as must always be the case where there is no restriction on exhibits. I was greeted by more than one with the observation that they hoped I would not "drag in the old masters" in my talks, that they were "trying to make good photographs, and not oil paintings." I cannot make out yet why the underlying principles of good art should not apply to both alike. Good composition, good lighting, good expression, simplicity, and all the other graces are of equal importance in photography and in the freer art of the brush. A good pose in painting is no less good in a photograph; an agreeable turn of the wrist or of the neck is as welcome in one as in the other. A skillful painter plays with light exactly as a photographer does. The only difference in these arts is that the painter now and then devises a color scheme and starts out with this as the basis of his picture. His brother of the sun-brush makes his composition in masses of dark and light.

The uncultivated photographer, ignorant of the artistic inheritance of the world, the written and unwritten laws of masterly achievement, knows but one thing, *i. e.*, how to get a "sharp" picture. The more minute and insistent the detail, the greater the success of the work. If you can see the individual hairs and the stitches in the buttonholes he glows with gratification. If by extraordinary good luck and a powerful lens he gets the very pores of the skin his joy is complete. No matter if we never see these things in looking at our friends, and prefer not to. No matter if the buttons or the trimmings on a lady's hat monopolize the attention, it is a good photograph because it is "clear."

Unhampered by the traditions of the camera and vastly ignorant of the reputations of its disciples, the writer approached the exhibit in the state of mind so often voiced in phrase paradoxical, "I don't know anything about it, but I know what I like." As a rule, we pro-



CHILD PORTRAIT
BY REEVES, ANDERSON, IND.

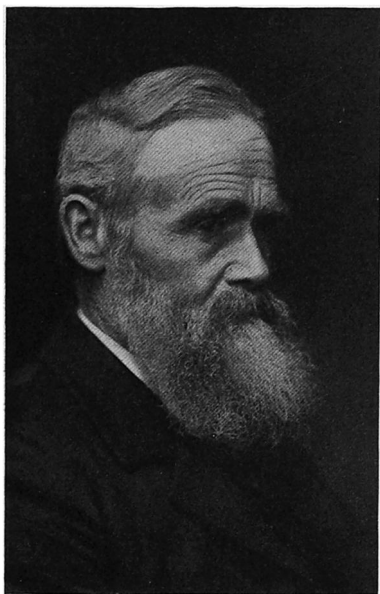
fessors of one or another of the arts smile a bit derisively at such assurances, and I doubt not that my calm criticisms of recognized leaders and my exaltation of unknown men amused more than one authority on "good, sharp" portraiture. But really half the pleasure of any collection lies in picking out one's favorites, and I had a good time of many hours' duration in that long, stuffy tunnel, discovering things. In the following reminiscence I shall omit some prize winners



GIRL WITH VIOLIN, BY AUNE, PORTLAND, OREGON

whom I did not like or found indifferent, and I may include some not generally admired who suited my fancy.

Pirie McDonald of Albany is the acknowledged leader of the profession, and takes grand prizes whenever he wishes to compete. He is an artist in temperament and in appearance—a modern artist, not a representative of the unkempt Bohemian school of ancient fame. His work has distinction, and from pose and lighting down to framing betokens the thoughtful consideration of a man of taste. The sub-



PORTRAIT, BY MINNS, AKRON, OHIO

jects of his larger group of portraits were not especially interesting for reproduction, however, and I did not ask for them. A panel photograph of Bishop Doane with enormous paunch ecclesiastical was the most striking. The composition was bold and original, the modeling of the head superb. Mr. McDonald's group of miniatures could not be surpassed in artistic quality. Exquisite is the only word which conveys the quality of that little constellation of jewels. The poses inclining somewhat to the dramatic, retain their vitality in these tiny pictures of beautiful women. In mounting, a simple band of gold around each, against a background of tawny velvet, produced an effect of remarkable richness and elegance.

The exhibit of miniatures was something new this year and brought out some admirable work. James Arthur of Detroit was accorded next place to Mr. McDonald, and Decker & Edmonson of Cleveland stood third. I had hoped to reproduce here one of Mr. Edmonson's delightful little portraits—a girl in white—which is a really notable work of art. Other good things in this dainty branch of photography were by Moses & Son of New Orleans, J. E. Giffin of Wheeling, West Virginia, Stein of Milwaukee, and D. Rosser of Pittsburg, who had some beautiful miniatures, unfortunately mounted upon screaming red plush.

A man who interested me very much, both through his work and later through his own personality, was George Van Norman of Springfield, Massachusetts, who received this year for the second time the "grand genre" prize. (I noticed that no two of them pronounced the French word alike, but they managed to understand each other.) Mr. Van Norman is an artist to his finger tips and his "Evening of Life" was considered by many "the picture of the exhibit." It is a photograph which possesses the qualities of great painting, in spite of which dangerous leaning it received the homage of the "artists" and the "scientists" alike. Their admiration for a really good thing proved that some of these advocates of the unbridled lens have better taste than

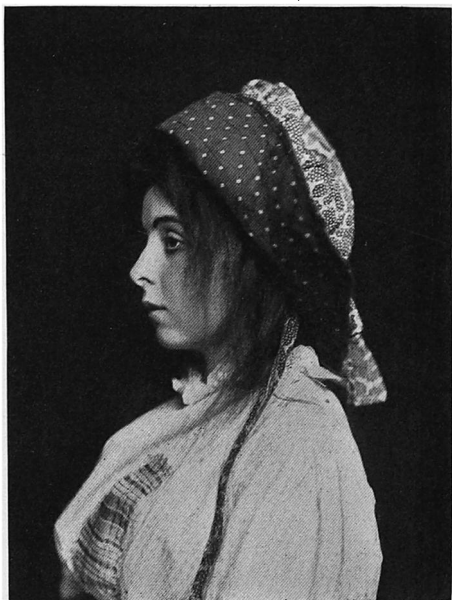
their usual arguments would indicate. When I came to look at Mr. Van Norman's other work I found so much of interest that nothing short of a special article seemed adequate, and this we can promise with some remarkable illustrations for a little later on.

One of the finest exhibits, in my estimation, was made by Partridge of Boston—a series of "carbons" within a somber array of broad, black frames. A head of an old man, suggestive of Carlyle or Ruskin, was repeated in two positions, and was a splendid achievement. Mr. Partridge's attempts at decorative composition with semi-nude figures were less happy, for the literal rendering of the figure is inevitably far removed from the ideal. And yet his "Spring" was very beautiful.

An extraordinary head of an old Italian by Elias Goldensky of Philadelphia attracted great attention on account of its vividness and relief. It was one of the most minutely detailed works, but happily combined with this a marvelous lighting. It has received honors in several exhibitions of this country and Europe, I believe. Another of Mr. Goldensky's portraits which seemed to me more genuinely artistic was promised me for this article, but has not arrived in time.

Other pictures promised, but which have not come to hand, are admirable characterizations of men, women, and children by J. A. Brush of Minneapolis, a fine old gentleman by I. Benjamin of Cincinnati—to whose splendid exhibit in Columbus last year I devoted an article—a very sculptural and plastic head of a young lady of beautiful profile by Strauss of St. Louis, whose whole exhibit was interesting and original.

A powerful head of a man under a broad-brimmed hat by Schreiber of West Bend, Wisconsin, was among the best of the more direct renderings of nature. E. F. Gray of Watertown, New York, is



THE MARCHIONESS, BY SPELLMAN, DETROIT, MICH.

another who arranges his "patients" comfortably. His "Interrupted Reading," showing a grim, sharp-eyed old farmer looking up from his newspaper, was a fine genre subject. Bateham of Norwalk and Karl G. Goddard of Lorain, Ohio, are likewise very successful in their poses. A strong man of fifty, by Goddard, shown last year in Columbus, had a perfect arrangement of the arms. The gentleman appeared again at Celoron this year, but his arms had been amputated by the mat and with them had vanished the really distinctive achievement of the picture.

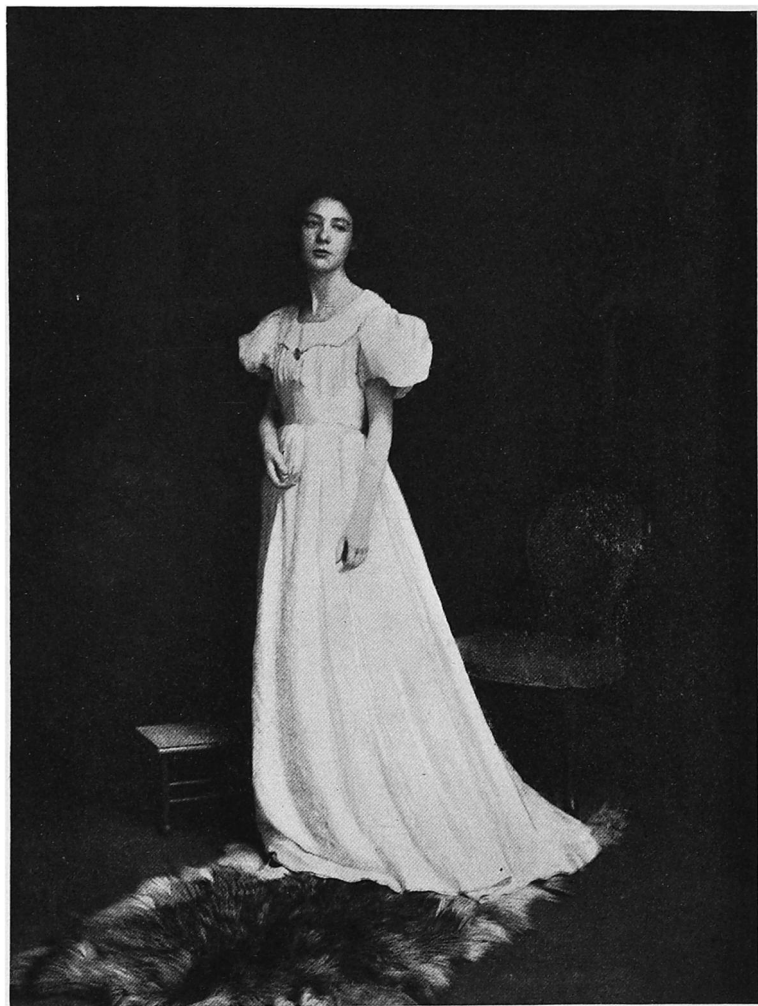
Rockwood of New York is one of the best known of our living photographers. A delightfully genial man to meet, he has the affection of all his younger brothers. Among his vivid representations of famous men of our day I found a small daguerreotype of half a century ago. There were magnificent-looking fellows in those times, and how picturesque the costume! Was this the reason that the tintype seemed to me by far the most artistic thing in the exhibit of the popular photographer?

J. S. Giffin of Wheeling, West Virginia, showed pictures of very unequal merit. Two of them, "St. Cecilia" and a standing figure of a young lady leaning on a chair, were among the best things in the show. An attempt in a path strewn with failures is the "Madonna and Child," by Knaffle Bros. of Knoxville, Tennessee. Strange to relate, this attempt has not resulted in failure, but in a signal success. The artist has had the extreme good fortune to find a model of pure and almost perfect features and expression, and, more astonishing still, a baby of spiritual cast of countenance. They are happily posed, almost unconsciously, and all incongruous accessories suppressed. I would not have believed it possible to do anything so poetic and ethereal directly from nature.

But the pictures which I most regret of all I wanted and could not get are the lovely children studies by E. B. Core of New York, who makes a specialty of the portraits of little ones. Lightly printed upon creamy backgrounds, they were like fragrant flowers,—sweet peas and pansies. Some of these charming baby faces have been promised me and will be published when they arrive.

Nothing illustrates better the artistic progress of our country than the presence of people of taste and refinement throughout our more primitive regions. Their influence in the little villages of Indiana and Illinois, in the towns of the West from Oregon to New Mexico, is an omen of great good for our land. We may not get art galleries into these outposts of civilization very speedily, but these men do their part, and together with our splendidly illustrated magazines which penetrate everywhere, are potent factors in the development of our national taste.

For instance, I must confess that until a month ago I had never heard the name of Anderson, Indiana. It seems that it is a town of



MISS H—
BY HOLDEN, WISSAHICKON, PENNSYLVANIA

considerable size, which sprang up overnight a short while back, along with a gas well. There are good people there as in every one of our Western towns, and a photographer, too, who is an artist. Indiana soil seems to sprout artists as luxuriantly as it spouts gas. Reeves is his name, and his group of pictures attracted much attention. We allow him to speak for himself in the portrait of his daughter which appears herewith, one of the most artistic products of any studio in this country. There are famous artists, photographers, and painters



PORTRAIT, BY BRENNER, CINCINNATI

alike, who have never approached in their work the charm of this modest, sweet little figure. It is a picture worthy of Abbott Thayer or George de Forest Brush, and well deserves the full page which we give it.

Another fortunate artist who finds his best subjects within his own household is Alfred Holden of Wissahickon, Pennsylvania. In his portrait of his daughter—the standing figure in white—we have a pose of rare distinction, absolutely without fault. The most celebrated painter might be proud to have done it; indeed the effect of the print is that of an exquisite painting. No doubt this is a grave fault in the eyes of many photographers, but to me it is a rare excellence. Mr.

Holden often prints his shadows too dark, cutting his pictures up with black spots, but in this case the result is peculiarly rich and effective.

From distant Oregon came another exhibit of considerable interest, the work of Aune of Portland. Two pictures in particular I remember: a crouching, sibylline old woman—perhaps a gypsy—and a young girl with a violin, one of those happy, artless compositions which may be the result of a fortunate accident or of infinite pains and study, but which betokens in either case the artist sense of fitness in recognizing what is right.

Ohio averaged better by far than any other state. She produces good photographers as well as presidents. The state organization with its "salon" and its excellent criticisms by Mr. Beck of Cincinnati has resulted in great progress, and it was not surprising that several of the best exhibits were from that state. Mr. Brenner of Cincinnati had some very refined portraits, printed with the delicacy of dainty pencil drawings. We have been unable to obtain the one which pleased me most, but the "American Beauty," given herewith, suggests the quality of his work.

A similar delicacy, coupled with greater certainty of style, is shown in the really remarkable work of Mr. Minns of Akron, Ohio. Yes, Mr. Minns has certainly "arrived at a style," something vouchsafed

to but few, though of mannerisms there are more than enough to go around. The head of an old man selected to accompany this article illustrates his unerring characterization, but is perhaps less representative than the fair "Beatrice," with its light background and great refinement of lighting. Any one of his eight or ten portraits would have served our purpose, for whatever his subject he makes it interesting and artistic as well, with a thrift of apparent effort akin to the draughtsman's "few quick, nervous strokes." One feels that there was no trusting to luck here, but that the artist was sure of himself, and knew each time exactly what he was doing. I would go to him



GERTRUDE, BY MINNS, AKRON, OHIO

with perfect confidence and feel no question in regard to the results, unless it were a shadowy fear that he might "give me away" by too truthful and incisive a rendering. I believe him to be one of the best photographers in the country.

Another graduate of the Ohio school of experience is Mr. Spellman, now of Detroit, who is a successful young artist and a student as well. I was much attracted by his series of literary characters, the aftermath of a fancy dress party. His subjects were exceptionally good and in most cases he has succeeded in adding a superb lighting to their other qualifications, making of each a delightful little character study. Our selection ends with two charming heads of little girls, respectively from the studios of Mrs. Akers of Hornellsville, New York, and Vorhees of Albuquerque, New Mexico. I am glad that they have such artists in those widely separated towns. I am even more glad that they have such dear little faces there and everywhere to give pleasure to all whom they smile upon, and to make life worth living.

And so the good work goes on. A few may be standing still, but the majority are eager to advance, to learn and to do better than ever before. Nature is kind; there are good subjects everywhere throughout all this broad land; the photographer's resources are limitless. All he has to do is to keep on experimenting and thinking, not ignoring the great works of the past. The convention meets in Milwaukee next summer, and I look for a notable exhibit there. I would not miss it for a good deal, nor the handshakes of those fine fellows who bring the sunshine with them.

LORADO TAFT.